



RINGING IN YOUR EARS?

What It Is & What You Can Do About It

If you regularly hear ringing, buzzing, clicking or hissing sounds but there's no external sound causing it, you may have tinnitus. Tinnitus (TIN-ih-tus) is the perception of noise or ringing in the ears. The noise may vary in pitch from a low hum to a high squeal, and you may hear it in one or both ears. In some cases, the sound can be so loud it can interfere with your ability to concentrate or hear other sounds around you.

Tinnitus isn't a health condition itself, rather a symptom of an underlying condition, such as age-related hearing loss, an ear injury or a circulatory issue.

SHOULD YOU SEE YOUR DOCTOR?

Although it can indeed prove to be an annoyance, tinnitus usually isn't a sign of something serious. However, if you have a ringing or buzzing sound that's not going away and it's bothering you, see your doctor. You'll also want to give your healthcare provider a call if:

- » You develop tinnitus after a respiratory infection, such as a cold, and your tinnitus doesn't improve within a week.
- » You have tinnitus that occurs suddenly or without an apparent cause.
- » You have hearing loss or dizziness with the tinnitus.

Your doctor will first look to identify any underlying conditions that may be causing your tinnitus. The treatment plan he/she recommends will be based on what's identified. For example, sometimes blood vessel conditions can cause tinnitus. If your doctor finds this is the case, he/she may prescribe a certain medication or change your current medications (if you're taking any).

SELF-CARE

For many people, tinnitus can improve with treatment. Many treatments focus on reducing or masking the bothersome noise and include:



White noise machines. Background noise tends to drown out tinnitus sounds. Most department stores offer white noise devices that produce simulated sounds such as falling rain or ocean waves. Or, you can just try turning on a fan or playing some music on low volume to help alleviate the ringing or buzzing noise you hear.

Masking devices. Masking devices are worn in the ear, similar to hearing aids, and produce a continuous, low-level white noise that suppresses tinnitus symptoms.

Stress reduction and/or meditation techniques. Relaxation and stress reduction techniques like yoga, deep breathing or meditation may help you divert your focus from the irritations in your life. Try to find a relaxation technique that works for you (this is good advice if you suffer from tinnitus or not!).

These treatments have been proven effective by many who suffer from tinnitus. In other cases, the sound(s) can go away on their own with no treatment.

COMMON SIGNS OF HEARING LOSS

Hearing loss tends to become more common as we age, but it can indeed occur at any stage of life (especially if it's noise-induced hearing loss). Here are the common signs of hearing loss: Trouble understanding phone conversations

- » Difficulty hearing when background noise (not at a high volume) is present
- » Feeling as though everyone talking to you is not speaking clearly or that they're mumbling
- » Frequently asking people to repeat themselves
- » Frequently misunderstanding what people say
- » Consistent complaints or comments that you're talking loudly or have your music or TV on too loud

